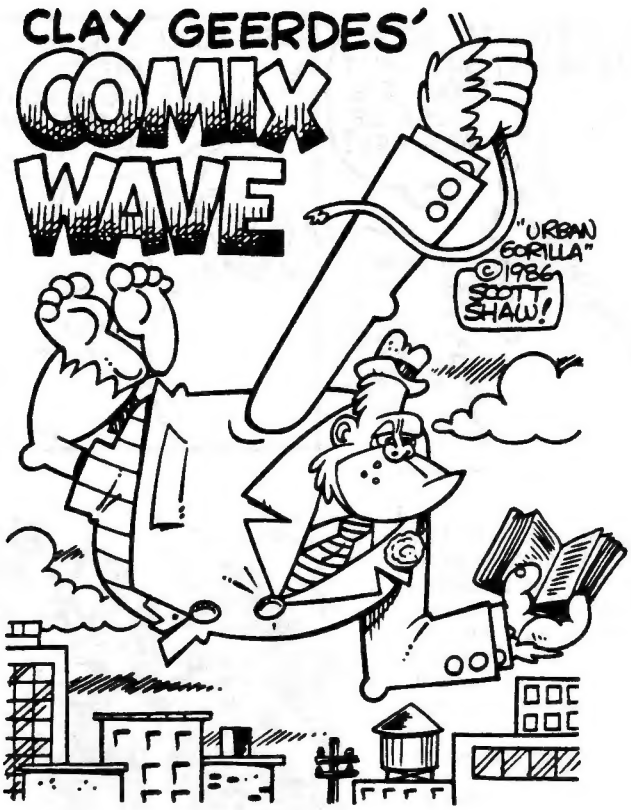

JANUARY 14, 1967

In MY SCIENCE PROJECT, Dennis Hopper returns from a time warp, dressed in his EASY RIDER buckskins, to be busted, thrown in a squad car, and driven off to jail; for what? Presumably just because of the way he looks and talks. Wild eyed glowing angelic tripper from space, a fuckin' hippie, for God's sake, a speed freak; well, Dennis flashed me back into the sixties and I realized that it was almost the 20th anniversary of the biggest gathering of people I had ever seen or hope to see, the "gathering of the tribes" which took place in the Polo Grounds of Golden Gate Park in San Francisco on January 14, 1967. Now at that time, there were a hell of a lot more people getting stoned at the beach and polishing their surf boards than there were wearing Indian and Western drag on Haight Street and Hippie was just something some journalist started and Hollywood finished. Hippie got the same image Beatnik had, because the people producing t-v series are a lot of really stupid clods with one track minds in which cops are clean-shaven heroes and anyone who is critical of establishment policies is automatically portrayed as unshaven and longhaired; needless to say they didn't really know how to deal with Jesus or George Washington, both longhairs in their time, nor could they have dealt with half the presidents of this country up until the razor blade and shaving cream companies got it brainwashed into thinking naked faces were natural and beards symbolized anarchy and rebellion and uncleanliness. Most of the people at the Be-in that morning in 1967 were clean-shaven and conservatively dressed; there were only a few hundred in costumes of various kinds, and most of these were entertainers like the guys in the Sopwith Camel or the Quicksilver Messenger Service and the Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead; oh, the poets tended to dress in non-American threads, Allen Ginsberg wore an Indian shirt, but the people who came to the park to see everything, to find out what it was the Oracle and the Berkeley Barb were advertising, wore their button down collars and chinos and jeans. I was in my college professor uniform, cord jacket, etc. It was a perfect day, clear blue sky, no clouds, no fog or smog, warm, and everyone we saw was headed the same way we were, down Haight Street to the park; all those people in motion and it wasn't even a marathon like the Bay to Breakers, nothing was really being promoted at all, it was basically noncommercial. By the time the chains caught wind that something was happening in the Haight-Ashbury, whatever IT was had already moved elsewhere, leaving the Gray Line tourists to eat all those "love burgers". Nor were most of the people stoned on anything but the good-feelings of one another. There was a lot of drug talk, but many of those who talked about drugs all the time never used them; they were like those who are always talking about sex. It was an optimistic day. The bands played all afternoon and part of the evening. People danced and talked, made love in the bushes, blew soap bubbles, ate their picnic lunches, talked about the war in Viet Nam, about political strategy; a strong sense of unity permeated the crowd. It was WE, not ME. People were more often seen sharing things than trying to hustle from others. The politicos and the hippies spent less time arguing than usual. This was a time when Timothy Leary was urging people to "turn on, tune in, and drop out," a philosophy that ultimately resulted in Reaganism. If people had stayed in and fought, the ultra-right would not have had such an easy time taking over America and turning back the clock. Free LSD ultimately led to emotional disorientation and political apathy; a recreational drug, it was not. Ah, there were so many adverse ideas and philosophies afloat that day. Allen Ginsberg had been to India to study and when he read his poetry, he would usually spend part or most of the time chanting mantras as he accompanied himself on his harmonium. The first time I saw Allen read was back in the mid-fifties. He was dressed in black. He stood on a crate in front of a mom and pop grocery store on upper Grant Avenue, reading his poem, America. As the sixties began, his book, HOWL, proved too honest for the establishment, and bookstores that sold it were being cited. Poets were giving benefit readings for HOWL, many of them taking place at Lawrence Ferlinghetti's CITY LIGHTS BOOKSTORE, the hub of Beat culture in San Francisco. Beat was short for Beatitude, though it later took on different connotations in the hands of ignorant pop journalists. Like Hippie. Hip came from Hep and to say someone was hip was praise in the new underground, hence it was a pejorative in the overground papers and tv newscasts. In the fifties, just after the Second World War, existentialism was the trend, written about often by Norman Mailer in the new VILLAGE VOICE (founded 1955). At that time, you were either Hip or Square. Hip survived into the sixties and you were either Hip or Straight. Mailer summed it up in his essay, THE WHITE NEGRO, and in the mid-sixties, Limeliter, Lou Gottlieb, explained it all to a UC audience as "negritude." That being the assimilation of the culture and attitudes of the American Black by a young generation of alienated whites; Gottlieb, the founder of Morningstar Ranch, was referring to the infiltration of black music into white culture via rock and roll. At this time, it was still standard practice for songs written and performed by black musicians to be "covered" by white singers, which meant that someone like Pat Boone would have a hit like "Tutti-Frutti" while Little Richard's own version would be heard less widely. I know I had never heard of Big Mama Willa Mae Thornton until that weekend I saw her onstage at the Fillmore Auditorium and I was surprised to learn that she was the author of Elvis Presley's hit, HOUND DOG. I'm not going to go into any musicology here, but American music was changed forever by what happened in Haight-Ashbury in the sixties. At the Fillmore, Avalon, or Western Front, we saw all of the great black blues bands and all of the best rock and roll bands and it was because of the scene that existed in Haight-Ashbury that bands like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones always wanted to schedule San Francisco on their American tours. One thing that has happened since then and now is a change in the way people act toward the band people. I remember standing around on the panhandle, listening to Marty Balin and Jorma Kaukonin and Jerry Garcia talk. There were no armed security guards, no giant bodyguards, because none were needed. Today, musicians have almost as many guards around them as politicians. I don't remember any fear on the streets around Haight until late 1967 when the mafia drug dealers took over the turf and the Mayor's Tac Squad starting sweeping the streets. But, like any art colony, Haight-Ashbury was destined to have a short span. The landlords soon saw that people were coming into the area, looking for apartments, wanting to be where the in-crowd was, where the action was, and this meant they could renovate old houses and get high rents. Higher rents meant that the people who had moved into the neighborhood for the lower rents were now aced out by the weekend acid trippers from Montgomery Street. Before long, the character of the street shifted to favor the more affluent newcomers and the police came along to protect the money as they always do. With hard drugs now on the street, the free clinic got busier with founder David Smith reporting heroin addiction in the thousands. The Sunshine Superman was gone by the end of 1968 and people were talking about communes up in Mendocino or Sonoma.

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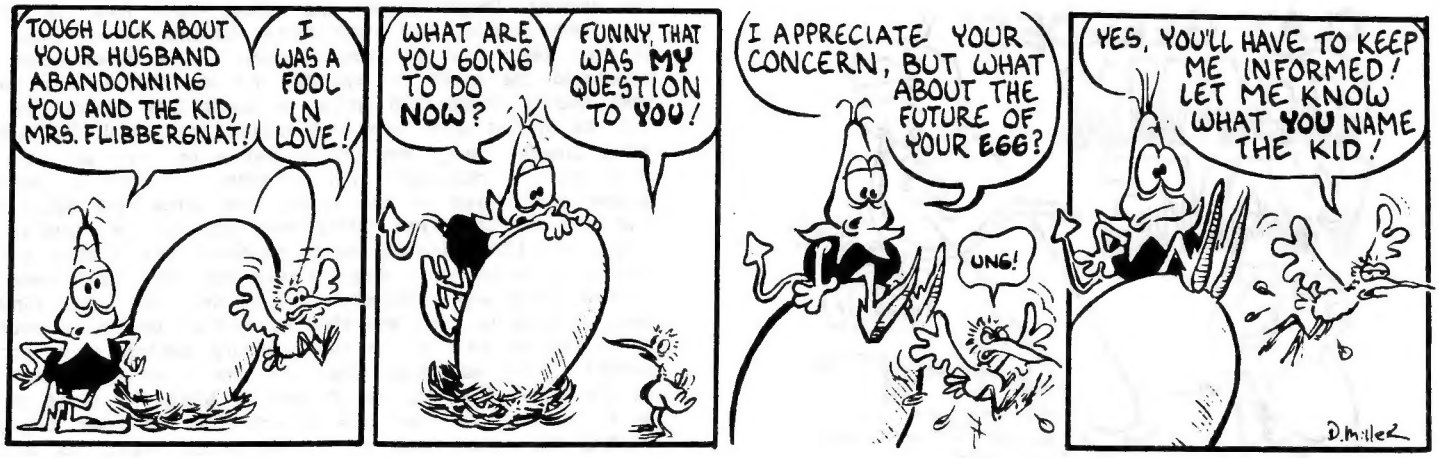
TOUGH LUCK ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND ABANDONNING YOU AND THE KID, MRS. FLIBBERGNAT!
I WAS A FOOL IN LOVE!
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?
FUNNY, THAT WAS MY QUESTION TO YOU!
I APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE OF YOUR EGG?
UNG!
YES, YOU'LL HAVE TO KEEP ME INFORMED! LET ME KNOW WHAT YOU NAME THE KID!
D.Miller

COMIX PLUGOLA

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I knew people who got into that pattern. They would grow some grass up in the country, harvest it in the fall, make a short trip down to the city, sell their keys, and go back to the country life. Many are still living this pattern, I am sure. Just what happens when an art colony ends? Well,the people that move in after the creators are gone will try to make folks believe that it is still the hot spot; after all, they are there now, right? And aren't they hot? Shouldn't everyone want to go and hang out with them? No. And people don't. They look for the next spot, be it Aspen or Taos, and they try to get there. Eventually, the people who moved in after the creators have gone either give up their search for the art mecca or they move on to the next one, leaving the old one a ghost colony. Other scenes do not survive what has happened in them. Hollywood, post-Manson, is filled with armed camps, homes surrounded by electrified fences, guard dogs and closed-circuit tv surveillance; it was not like that in 1967. Ultimately, the Be-ins and Love-ins of the sixties were marketed and sold like everything else. The band scene grew and became wealthy. The Jefferson Airplane bought the old Caruso mansion on Fulton Street near the park in San Francisco. Bill Graham branched out and got rich, the only member of the old San Francisco Mime Troupe to do so. The last time I saw Allen Ginsberg, he had shaved, but he was still an activist. He was reading on the steps of Sproul Hall at a benefit against Apartheid. To see many of the familiar faces from the sixties, you have to watch PBS, because mainstream tv never shows them. Groups like the Limeliters and the Kingston Trio and the Brothers Four are doing nostalgia concerts; so are Peter, Paul, and Mary. The idea of the Be-In or Love-In peaked on the East Coast at Woodstock and on this coast at Altamont in 1969. There are still people around trying to get huge numbers of people to go to certain places for grandiose parties, but the money just isn't there now and it's not so easy to get a ride hitching, and, I don't know, maybe, people just have other things they would rather do nowadays than travel thousands of miles to hang out with strangers and listen to more music.